Introduction

Introduction

To take a glimpse of our base's rich history...

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Those who attended the official dedication ceremonies for Bolling Field on a hot summer day in 1918 could not possibly imagine the important role that this 350-acre tract would play in shaping the future of military aviation. The field served not only as the "gateway to the nation's capital, " but also as a launching pad for the aviation dreams of such pioneers as Billy Mitchell, Henry "Hap" Arnold, Carl Spaatz, Ira Eaker, Jimmy Doolittle and even Charles Lindbergh. The field was named for another aviator who was just as determined to promote the importance of airpower, Colonel Raynal C. Bolling, the first high ranking American officer killed in World War I.

Video Clips..		
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Field personnel never knew what to expect from a day on the Bolling flightline. One day they might be preparing for the first night flights from Washington, or welcoming the pilots of the first round-the-world flight; on another they might be checking the engine of the celebrated Spirit of St. Louis. These were the record-setting early days of Bolling Field, when daring aerial accomplishments were surpassed as quickly as they were demonstrated.

To the military members of Bolling, it was not just another assignment. They took great pride in being apart of the flying activities here, for they probably knew that at this

fledgling Field, history was in the making. As pilot Franz Blumberg wrote for the Evening Star in late 1927 after his first flight out of the Field:

> *"Down below, Bolling Field dropped farther and farther away. Off to the left the tiny dome of the Capitol glistened in the morning sunlight. And, doggone, there were the Congressional Library and the House and Senate Buildings. Insignificant looking little structures, mere play houses. Higher and higher we soared until the altimeter indicated that we were at 5,000 feet. It was exactly 10:42 when we left the ground at Bolling Field, the day clear and the visibility perfect. A mile under us was a sight which will charm air travelers of the future as they journey over the world. Roads winding crazily, sentinel trees casting long morning shadows, patches of brown and gold woodland and a long freight train winding over the ground! Off in the distance the earth blended into a purple horizon."*

Flying operations have long since disappeared from Bolling. The flight line is silent and has been replaced by office buildings; the runway by homes for Air Force families. But today, Bolling still stands as the Air Force's most visible representative in our nation's capital and a constant reminder of a bygone era steeped in history, tradition and pride.

Unfortunately, following World War II, Bolling's historical signifigance was lost and the beauty of the brick and stone buildings constructed in the 1930s was obscured by the temporary wooden buildings and warehouses built during the war. What follows is a brief glimpse at the rich heritage that surrounds this magnificent base. It is our hope that this booklet will rekindle memories and transport you back to an era when a new breed of heroes was capturing the hearts and imaginations of america. We now invite you to rediscover the past...

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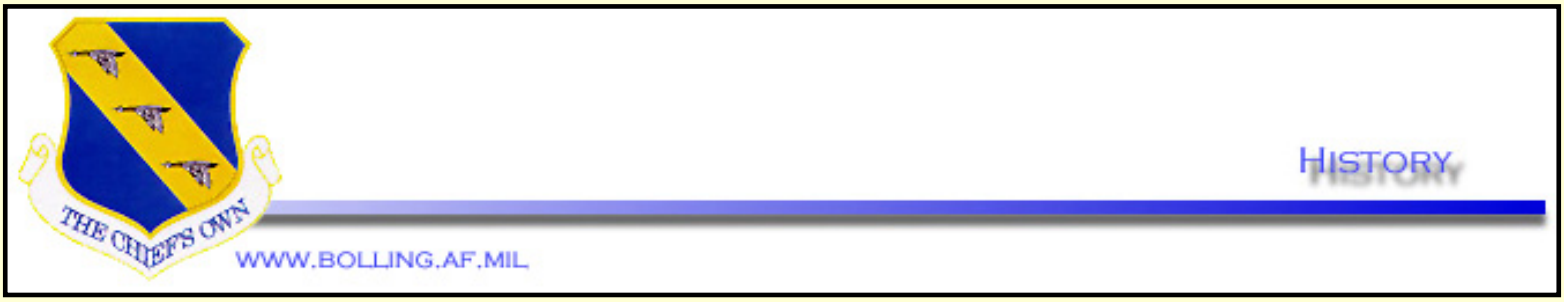
To take a glimpse of our base's rich history, select one of the choices below. You can jump around to various points in the past or start at the very beginning. Be aware that many of the following photographs are large in their file size and depending on the speed of your network/internet connection may take some time to download.



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Proud Beginnings

Bolling Field was officially dedicated on July 1, 1918, after the property was purchased by the War Department and turned over to the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps to serve as the primary aviation facility for the capital city. As sparse as the area might have appeared on that day, a handful of military leaders had the vision to look the field's meager beginnings as it heralded the dawn of a new era in national defense. This new threshold into military airpower was appropriately named for Colonel Raynal C. Bolling, an early vanguard in the quest for Army airmanship. The colonel had been killed during World War I by German officers near the front lines in Amiens, France.

"As in flying, you are only in danger near the ground. If you can get high enough above things and keep enough height, gusts may upset you but you come out of them safely enough. The whole trouble in life is that we keep too near the ground and then, when we get into trouble, before we get the machine under control again we 'crash', as the flyers call it. Also, the worse things look on the ground, the more need to get up as high above them as quickly as we can."

Colonel Raynal C. Bolling

Just a few years before the name Bolling referred to the flying field, Colonel Raynal Cawthorne

Bolling made his mark in military aviation history. A man known for his intelligence, courage and great wit, the colonel was the first high-ranking officer killed in World War 1.

Bolling graduated from Harvard College in 1900, then went on to obtain his law degree with academic honors from Harvard Law School in 1902. As one fellow graduate wrote to Bolling's son after the colonel's death: "We knew then (at Harvard) that he would be a great man. We called him 'colonel' in college days, not knowing that our affectionate nickname was prophetic of the actual title he would so honorably earn."

Raynal Bolling's first employment after graduation from law school was with a private law firm in New York. There he quickly accumulated professional experience and within a year was able to join the Law Department of the U.S. Steel Corporation as assistant to the General Solicitor, a position he held for 10 years. He seemed destined for success when, at the age of 35, he was promoted to the position of General Solicitor. At the time, Bolling was a corporal in the New York National Guard.

Gradually the news from Europe worsened and, after the sinking of the Lusitania, the Harvard Club of New York sponsored a Business Man's Camp in Plattsburg, New York, which 70 prominent New Yorkers attended. Among them was First Lieutenant Bolling with the 1st Motorized Machine Gun Company, which he had organized in 1915. He soon earned the rank of captain in the Signal Corps of the New York National Guard.

Upon returning from camp, the eager soldier-lawyer wasted no time. While at Plattsburg he had received some elementary flight instruction in a Gallaudet aircraft, and the seeds that were planted in his mind began to grow. Bolling realized the military potential of the "aeroplane" and consequently helped to organize an Aero Company of the New York National Guard. On October 25, 1916, Bolling was awarded the Expert Aviator's certificate.

After President Woodrow Wilson mobilized the National Guard, Bolling's Aero Company was ordered

to recruit enough men to bring it to full strength. They trained at Mineola, New York, for three months.

On April 7, 1917, one day after President Wilson delivered his war message to Congress, Bolling put on his uniform and requested continuous active duty. Leaving his wife and four children in Connecticut, he went to Mineola to await orders from Washington. Because of his business experience, combined with his knowledge of aviation, Major Bolling's first duty was to draft a bill for Congress to authorize the Air Service program.

In June 1917, upon the advice of the Aircraft Production Board, he was named to head the "Bolling Commission", an aeronautical group sent to Europe for the purpose of choosing aeronautical equipment the U.S. should manufacture from among Allied airplanes that had already been tested in battle.

Just 18 days after the arrival of General Pershing, the Bolling Commission, consisting of 11 Army, Navy and civilian aviation experts, landed in Liverpool to begin their European expedition. "I have a hard job ahead of me, and I vish I could be more sure that the people in Washington can and will do what they promise in the production of airplanes and engines and the training of pilots," he wrote on the voyage over. With regard to flight training, the Bolling Com mission agreed that American cadets would receive preliminay instruction in the U.S. and then be shipped overseas to receive advanced courses at English, Fench and Italian flying schools. Determining what types of aircraft would be manufactured by the U.S. was not an easy undertaking. Major Bolling believed that the best qualified judges of combat aircraft were the pilots themselves.

More than anything, it seemed Bolling was a fierce advocate of military preparedness. "Whatever may be thought of our delay in the decision to enter the war, our failure to make every possible preparation during the last three years is the greatest shame and crime in our national history," he wrote from France to his wife, Anna, in 1917.

By August 1917, the necessary work of the Bolling Commission had been completed. In a report to Washington, Bolling recommended that, of the more than 120 types of Allied aircraft, the British DH-4 and the French Spad be manufactured in the United States.

His work on the commssion successfully accomplished, Bolling was promoted to colonel on August 8. "While I have been waiting for replies to my cables asking whether I was to come back home as planned or to stay here, General Pershing has decided that he wishes me to take command of all his aviation organization in the Zone of the Interior, as it is to be called to distinguish it from the Zone of Advance," he stated in one of his letters. "This means that Colonel (William) Mitchell is to command all the aviation forces at the front, the fighting forces, and I am to command all the rest of the aviation forces here and have charge of production and all sorts of things necessary to keep the fighting forces going."

A high-strung man accustomed to dawn-to- midnight action, Colonel Bolling grew restless in his latest

position. "I get terribly lonesome at times, and the long absence seems almost more than I can bear, but yet I know I could not bear to have no part in all this," he wrote in another letter to his wife. "Of course, it would be easier if I were out toward the front somewhere in camp and not here in Paris, just a son of businessman in uniform!"

During the spring of 1918, he wrote the following to his sister: "When this war is over, I am going to take any balance of years belonging to me in a complete enjoyment of all the little things in life - with a considerable indifference for the supposed big things in life. I am going again after many years to read books, and to enjoy friends just because I like them and they like me, and to keep my heart mellow with the love of my wife and children and the joys of my own home."

Unfortunately, the colonel never got to see those plans through. He was killed by Germans while driving near the front lines in Amiens, France, only a few weeks after those words were written.

The acres of land on which Bolling Field was situated were originally known as "Gisborough." Since the mid-1600s, this area was documented as a plantation home for various affluent families, as well as a Civil War cavalry depot that accommodated up to 30,000 horses.

A more extensive history of the Gisborough area was unearthed in the mid-1930s. When construction workers discovered human bones on the site, the district coroner was alerted who, in turn, notified the Smithsonian Institution. After closely examining the bone specimens, the museum researchers reported that the findings were "further evidence of a habitation site in the vicinity," concluding that the village was Nacotchtanke Indian. According to these experts, the date the Nacotchtanke village was abandoned is uncertain, but it more than likely occurred during the middle of the 17th century.

Private ownership of the land began in 1663, when Thomas Dent was granted the property by authority of Caecilius Calvert, second Lord Baltimore, and continued with a succession of Dent descendents. (The area was named after Thomas Dent's hometown, "Guisborough," in Yorkshire, England.) In 1833, George Washington Young purchased the real estate, living comfortably on the Gisborough plantation until 1863, when he leased his land to the Federal Government for use as a cavalry depot. Following the Civil War, the real estate remained in the possession of the Young family, eventually becoming a river resort area known as Gisborough Park, City View, Capital View and Buena Vista.

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The Great Debate

The construction of Bolling Field was not yet complete when, following the Armistice, the question arose as to its future as an active station. After the war, there was enormous public pressure to reduce military expenditures during this period, as well as some element of doubt in Air Service circles as to the best location for a permanent aviation field in the Washington area. Some consideration was given to locations at College Park, Maryland, and near Mount Vernon, Virginia. However, the existing location began to look more appealing because of the cost involved in transferring the facilities elsewhere and the fact that real estate in other locations had become more expensive when it became known that the Air Service was interested in acquiring property. Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell, Assistant Chief of the Air Service and pioneer exponent of air power, tipped the scales further in Bolling's favor when he stepped into the breach and made his views undeniably clear as to the advantages of keeping Washington's primary flying field in its present location.

At one point in this seemingly endless battle, Colonel Oscar Westover, later to become Chief of the Air Corps, even recommended "that the activities of Bolling Field be suspended, at least for the present." On June 4, 1919, Colonel Westover, in his capacity as Assistant Executive of the Division of Military Aeronautics, directed that Bolling Field be closed and cease to operate as an active Air Service station after June 10 and that it be abandoned as soon as possible thereafter. No record could be located of an outright cancellation of this order. However, in a memorandum to the Chief of the Air Service, dated June 12, 1919, signed by General Mitchell, the following statement appeared: "It is understood that Bolling Field is not to be abandoned for the present at least." There is a pencil note on this memorandum with "O.K." followed by the initials "CTM" - no doubt those of Major General Charles T. Menoher, Chief of the Air Service.

By October 1919, General Mitchell was Acting Chief of the Air Service and, of course, unwilling to part with Bolling Field or anything else that would contribute to the development of Army aviation. General Mitchell presented a strong case to the Secretary of War for extending the license for use of Bolling Field. He requested that the Air Service be authorized the indefinite use of this property, "or until some other site is prepared and ready for occupancy, to which the Air Service activities for the vicinity of Washington can be transferred." General Mitchell also pointed out that the existing arrangement was so uncertain and indefinite that it precluded the possibility "for the arrangement of definite plans for the disposition of troops, equipment and Air Service activities in the vicinity of Washington." Also included in the memorandum to the Secretary of War was a request that such Air Service personnel and equipment be maintained as were necessary to continue these activities, and also that available funds be used for necessary temporary repairs that would keep Bolling Field "in its present state of operation."

The needs of Bolling Field never escaped the watchful eye of General Mitchell. He acknowledged the fact that the War Department "did not consider Bolling Field as permanent" and strongly felt that the issue should be resolved. He summarized the situation in his customary forthright language: "If the question is to be agitated as to whether oit is to be given up by the War Department or not, it is believed that now would be a good time to start it."

The ultimate disposition of Bolling Field was still in doubt as late as 1922 when a board of officers was appointed "to investigate and make recommendations covering the choice of a suitable flying field for the location of permanent aviation activities." The board recommended that Bolling be retained as a flying field and that the most glaring deficiencies, such as poor drainage, restricted land space when flying east or west, and the lack of suitable ground for the erection of permanent quarters and barracks, be corrected.

The group of advisors reported that it would be possible to raise the elevation of the existing flying field and give it good drainage as soon as the temporary quarters and hangars were removed. The proceedings of the board also indicated that a large open area, which was in the process of being filled in by the engineering department, could be combined with the existing field to make an excellent aviation field.

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"Monster" Airliner Descends upon Bolling

In the midst of the debate over keeping Bolling open, flying activities at the field still managed to create headlines. The first passenger airliner ever to visit Washington arrived at Bolling Field September 19, 1919, on the first leg of its trip from New York to San Francisco. The "monster" 27-passenger Lawson airliner, at the time the largest aircraft in the world, had a wing span of 97 feet , a length of 50 feet and a height of 15 feet. Propelled by two 400-horsepower Libery motors, the average speed was about 90 miles per hour.

Nearly 200 spectators were on hand to welcome the Lawson and greeted its arrival with gasps of astonishment, perhaps recalling Jules Verne's popular books of futuristic fantasy. The passengers, some of society's most upper-crusted notables, were just as amazed by their voyage. "After getting aboard, one of the women wrote her will," recalled one passenger. "As we gracefully settled on the green sward of Bolling Field, she tore it into little pieces and flung them into the air saying, 'I wonder why I bothered to do a foolish thing like that!'"

Later in the week, Alfred W. Lawson, the planes designer and builder, hosted General John J. Pershing, Army Chief of Staff, and other high-ranking military officials as well as 20 senators and their wives for flights over Washington from Bolling Field.

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First Air Tournament attracts Thousands

Bolling Field was the place to be in May 1920 as more than 10,000 Washingtonians flocked to the field to see the first Army Air Tournament. It was an aerial show of unprecedented success for the Army Air Service, as its brave pilots performed daring feats of speed and acrobatic agility high above the awestruck crowd. The first day of the show was so successful that thousands of requests to extend the event poured into the office of the Chief of the Air Service, General Menoher. The general was pleased to comply and arranged not only the original stunts and flights to be repeated, but he also saw to it that new names and events were added to what would become a three-day aviation extravaganza.

The highlight of the first day was a record-setting flight by Lieutenant Fred Nelson in his German Fokker when he blasted onto Bolling Field from Middletown, Pennsylvania, a distance of 133 miles, in just 59 minutes. The crowd was also thrilled by dozens of daring acrobatic demonstrations and an exciting mock air battle.

An active participant of the day was Bolling Field's staunchest supporter, General "Billy" Mitchell. He deftly performed such stunts as loops, turns and barrel rolls to the delight of admirers below.

The second day's events were marked by a magnificent display of American aviation prowess as a number of pursuit planes demonstrated their precision and maneuverability in combat by waging a simulated attack on an observation balloon. Adding to the suspense, three airmen parachuted from the beseiged balloon, facing even more attacks on the way down.

On the third day, spectators were treated to the fastest flying ever seen above Washington. Ace pilot Lieutenant C.C. Brown zipped across the sky in his French Spad to finish a 12 and one half-mile heat in just four

Bolling Field, Anacostia, D. C., from the air

minutes and 20 seconds. As on the previous two days, the crowds also enjoyed various static displays and airplane repair demonstrations in the hangars.

Two brave airmen brought the tournament to a dramatic close when, during a 1,500-foot parachute drop from a balloon, they drifted off course to Potomac Park across the threatening waters of the Potomac.

The success of the first Army Air Tournament, the precursor to the modern-day air show, was especially critical during this era when the future of Bolling Field was still uncertain. It thrust Bolling into the spotlight and served to sway military as well as public opinion in a positive direction concerning the importance of maintaining Washington's aviation readiness, skill and strength at Bolling Field.

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Alaskan Expedition Flyers Honored

The sky above Washington was "almost black with planes" on October 21, 1920, as a convoy of aircraft escorted the four planes of the sensational Alaskan expedition to Bolling Field. The flyers flew in from Mineola, New York, where a few days earlier they had completed their epoch-making 9,000 mile roundtrip flight from New York to Alaska in 112 hours. They were greeted by Generals Pershing and Menoher. "When the four arctic planes were first sighted by scout planes, General Menoher entered his machine and ascended to meet the squadron, taking his position immediately behind the plane commanded by Captain St. Clair Streett, head of the expedition, and in that position flew to Bolling Field," wrote a Washington Post reporter. In addition to Captain Streett, commander of the Army's Arctic squadron, the other members of the Alaskan flight honored at the field were Captain Howard Douglas, Lieutenants Clifford C. Nutt, Eric Nelson, Clarence Crumrine and Ross C. Kirkpatrick and Sergeants J.E. Long and Joseph E. English.

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